RHODE ISLAND LIBRARY NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2003-2007

The needs of Rhode Island libraries reflect the needs of the people of the state. Libraries do not operate in a vacuum; they try to meet the needs identified within their communities or service groups in whatever way is defined by each library. Collaboration and cooperation is ubiquitous in Rhode Island, although much of this is within the boundaries of type (i.e. public, academic, school, special.)

In preparation of its Five-Year Plan for the years 2003-2007, the RI Office of Library & Information Services (OLIS) has considered a variety of information, studies and publications. The "environmental scan" summarizes the findings that are useful in identifying the needs that determine priorities for use of LSTA funds allotted to the State of Rhode Island.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

POPULATION

The 2000 census identified 1,048,319 individuals as living in the state of Rhode Island. This is an increase of 4% from 1990.

ETHNIC/CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Rhode Island is a culturally and ethnically diverse state. The total Hispanic population has almost doubled since 1990. In one urban core city almost half of the population is now Hispanic.

An estimated one in eight Rhode Islanders is foreign-born, making Rhode Island home to the highest number of immigrants per capita in the country. *(United Way)* The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) reported that Rhode Island's foreign-born population is 125,458 people or 12.4% of the population (using 2000 Census data). There are 56,284 naturalized U.S. Citizens (44.9%), 27,449 legal immigrants and an estimated 12,000 illegal aliens. According to FAIR, the Census Bureau has estimated that in July 2001 Rhode Island's population was 1,058,920 residents. Of that increase, it was estimated that the population increased by about 3,700 (34.5% of the increase) as a result of net international migration (immigrant settlement).

According to *The Providence Journal,* RI's primary newspaper, Rhode Island has the highest concentration in New England of people who do not speak English at home - some 20 percent of the population, compared to 19 percent in MA, 18 percent in CT, 8 percent in NH and ME, and 6 percent in VT.

INCOME

In mid-May 2002, the Census Bureau released a "snapshot" of the state that *The Providence Journal* called "a picture of teetering cities and blossoming suburbs and rural communities," adding, "Rhode Island's storied manufacturing centers – which fueled the state's economy from the beginning of the 19th century through World War II – are now the sick communities of the 21st century." After adjusting for inflation, the *Providence Journal* stated that the median income in almost all of Rhode Island's urban areas has declined considerably since the last census figures. Further, it was reported that the median household income in Rhode Island ranks fourth in New England, behind CT, MA and NH, and ahead of VT and ME.

Rhode Island has New England's highest proportion of people living below the federal poverty level, with about 9 percent of Rhode Islanders falling into that category, compared to 8 percent in ME, 7 percent in MA, 6 percent in CT and VT, and 4 percent in NH. *(The Providence Journal)*

Five core cities- Providence, Newport, Central Falls, Pawtucket and Woonsocket - have 30 percent of the state's population, but 60 percent of the poor. These five core cities have nearly 11,000 vacant lots, representing a loss of some $1.3 billion in assessed valuations. Over the last 10 years, these cities have lost 22,000 residents. *(United Way)*

During this time, their effective tax rates have jumped 44 percent, however, - - nearly 2.5 times the rise in suburban tax rates. Over the last 20 years, non-urban Rhode Island communities have gained 50,000 private-sector jobs; cities have lost 5,000 jobs. *(United Way)*

According to the Model-Based Income and Poverty Estimates for Rhode Island in 1997 the U.S. Census stated that there were 108,836 people of all ages in poverty (up from the 1990 census); 12,084 people under 5 in poverty. The median household income is $36,699, lower than the national median.

AGE

Almost 24% of the population recorded in the 2000 census are under 18 years of age. Six percent (6%) are under 5 years of age. Persons 65 or older are 14.5% (152,402) of the population of Rhode Island as compared to 12.4% nationally.

CHILDREN

The Providence Journal recently reported that the number of RI children living below the poverty line increased by more than 30 percent in the last 10 years. RI Kids Count, a child-advocacy organization, reported that more than 40 percent of the children in two of the core urban cities, Providence and Central Falls, live in poverty.

According to the *Kids Count Factbook 2001*, the state's child population of Hispanic/Latino children outpaced Census projections and reversed the downward trend that had existed from 1980 to 1990. In 1990, 16,100 of Rhode Island's children were of Hispanic origin. The 2000 Census reported that 35,000 of Rhode Island's children were of Hispanic or Latino origin, a 117% increase in the last decade! In addition, twenty-eight percent (28%) of White children, 55% of Black children and 61% of Hispanic children in Rhode Island lived in a single parent family in 1998. "Fifteen percent (15%) of White children lived in poor families in Rhode Island in 1998, compared to 35% of Black children, 37% of Asian children, 35% of American Indian children and 49% of Hispanic children in the state."

Child Care and Head Start

- In 1996, only 41% of 3 to 5 year olds whose families had incomes below the poverty line were enrolled in early care and education programs in the U.S. compared to 58% of children whose families had incomes above the poverty line. Hispanic children were the least likely to participate in early childhood programs in the two years preceding kindergarten.

- In the U.S., Hispanic children face the most barriers to reading proficiency because they are more likely to be poor, less likely to attend pre-school, and more likely to have parents that have not finished high school. (*Kids Count Factbook 2001*)

The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education reports that the number of public school students eligible to receive free or reduced lunch; i.e., children living in families whose

incomes are at or below 185% of FPL – (the Federal poverty level) has grown from 31,046 in 1990-91 to 50,562 in 1998-99, an increase of 19,516 students (62.9% increase). *(United Way)*

EDUCATION
Rhode Islanders are generally better educated than they have been in the past. The number of residents without a high-school education has plummeted, while the number of those with a college education or more has jumped to its highest ever recorded, 26 percent of the population 25 years or older.

Despite big gains in the educational levels of Rhode Islanders, however, the state still lags behind all the other New England states except Maine in the proportion of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher. *(The Providence Journal)*

The United Way of Southeastern New England reports:

- The proportion of residents aged 25 and up with at least a high-school diploma is the smallest among the six New England states, and the proportion with at least a four-year college degree is second to the smallest - ahead only is Maine's.

- Nearly 81 percent of Rhode Islanders 25 and up had high school diplomas as of March 1999 – up from 73 percent in 1989 and 21 percent in 1940, the earliest available record. And nearly 27 percent had at least a four-year college degree - up from about 20 percent in 1989 and 4.5 percent in 1940.

Although Rhode Island ranked second to last among the New England states in its percentage of college graduates, it ranked 15th nationally.

- United States (1999) High School Graduate or more: 83.4%; college graduate or more: 25.2%. Rhode Island (1999) High School Graduate or more: 80.9%; college graduate or more 26.8%.

- In Rhode Island, of the 5,253 people who took one or more GED tests in 1999, 2,623 completed the test series, and 2,232 passed.

- There exists a significantly low level of adult literacy in Rhode Island; 46% of the adult population is performing below minimum standards.

In a report issued in August 2001, the RI Dept. of Education reported: "**State's SATs drop, ending three-year streak of improved scores"**

  - RI Commissioner of Education McWalters noted that the SAT scores confirm what the state's own tests have shown: that there are "two Rhode Islands—the urban school districts and the rest of the state." Students in the state's urban public high schools (in Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, and Providence) scored 442 on the SAT verbal and 446 on the SAT mathematics, more than 50 points lower than the state as a whole.

  - In addition, the gap between white and minority students continues to exist, though black students improved this year by a total of 11 points and Asian students by 28 points. Hispanic students' scores declined by 16 points.

DISABILITIES
An aging population usually reflects higher numbers of individuals with disabilities. The *Rhode Island Disability Chartbook, 2000* states that 21% of the population has been identified as having disabilities. It provides the following information:

- The rate of disability increased substantially with age, ranging from 14% for those aged 18-44 to 45% for those over 75.

- The rate of disability was higher among women, and persons with lower education and lower household incomes, due partly to high proportion of the elderly in these groups.

- Employment rate was strongly associated with disability status. Among working age (18-64) adults, 31% of persons with severe disabilities, 62% of persons with moderate disabilities, and 81% of persons with no disabilities were either employed for wages or self-employed.

- The differences in employment rates by disability status clearly led to the disparities in annual household incomes. Among those aged 18-64, 58% of persons with severe disabilities, 37% of persons with moderate disabilities, and 20% of persons with no disabilities had annual household incomes less than $25,000.

People with disabilities would have difficulty using library facilities and technology. Of the major impairments listed in this report, statistics of interest to libraries would be:

DISABILITY	1998	2000
Back or neck problem	16.1 %	16.2%
Arthritis / rheumatism	11.4%	14.3%
Lung / breathing problem	9.0%	5.5%
Heart problem	8.1%	9.7%
Fractures, bone / joint injury	7.2%	6.9%
Walking problem	5.9%	4.1%
Eye / vision problem	2.7%	3.0%
Hearing problem	1.3%	.6%

According to the 1998 Rhode Island Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, an estimated 155,000 people, or 21%, of the non-institutionalized Rhode Island adult (ages 18 and older) population had some degree of disability due to an impairment or health problem. As the U.S. population gets older, the number of people with a disability is expected to increase sharply in the next couple of decades. (In their update to the *Chartbook*, the RI Department of Health updated their statistics using the 2000 Rhode Island BRFSS data: 183,000 adults with disabilities or 24.6%).

People of all ages, races, and ethnicities are moving more and more to an online environment. Having access and the ability to use online tools is especially important to members of our community who have difficulties due to physical or mental constraints. The tremendous communications capabilities of the Internet could provide an important tool to help people with disabilities to overcome certain of the challenges they face. However, the data show that people with disabilities are less likely than the population as a whole to use computers or the Internet. (A Nation Online…Feb.2002)

A survey conducted in January 2002 through the *TechACCESSory* newsletter, a newsletter for disabled individuals and service providers, provided some insights into use of libraries in Rhode Island. People were asked to finish the sentence “I would use my public library if… “(Selected comments listed below.)

- the library would be more accessible to my legally blind child if its computers had a large print screen and/or speech output
- I had staff to go with me

- I could get transportation and have more computer skills
- staff could get disability sensitivity/awareness training
- services were expanded
- there were more captioned videos
- a teacher should be there for people with disabilities
- they had a room where consumers could talk without having to be very quiet

A public library survey completed in 2001 indicated that most libraries in Rhode Island are accessible and that the libraries have attempted to provide some specific services and equipment for people with disabilities. A focus group the same year clarified that it would be helpful for libraries to contact local disability groups, people or organizations in their communities to describe current services and elicit the need for others that could be addressed.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN THE NATION

> "There has always been a gap between those people and communities who can make effective use of information technology and those who cannot. Now, more than ever, unequal adoption of technology excludes many from reaping the fruits of the economy.
>
> We use the term "digital divide" to refer to this gap between those who can effectively use new information and communication tools, such as the Internet, and those who cannot. While a consensus does not exist on the extent of the divide (and whether the divide is growing or narrowing), researchers are nearly unanimous in acknowledging that some sort of divide exists at this point in time." *(Digital Divide Network)*

There is a sizable segment of the U.S. population (as of September 2001) 46.1 percent of persons and 49.5 percent of households that does not use the Internet. These non-users include:

- People in households with low family incomes — 75.0 percent of people who live in households where income is less than $15,000 and 66.6 percent of those in households with incomes between $15,000 and $35,000.

- Adults with low levels of overall education—60.2 percent of adults (age 25 +) with only a high school degree and 87.2 percent of adults with less than a high school education.

- Hispanics—68.4 percent of all Hispanics and 85.9 percent of Hispanic households where Spanish is the only language spoken.

- Blacks—60.2 percent of Blacks

"Different rates of computer and Internet use result from such factors as income, education, use at school, and use at work in different occupations. Income still matters because computers and Internet subscriptions still cost a significant amount of money. On the other hand, income becomes less a factor as prices of computers and Internet subscriptions decline. For school-age children, we found substantial differences in home access to computers and the Internet according to household income. When school and library use are taken into account, however, differences in computer and Internet use among children were much smaller. Among adults, higher levels of education are

associated both with greater income and with occupations that tend to use computers and the Internet at work. Once again, we found that computers and the Internet were becoming more common in occupations with lower rates of use." *(A Nation Online, Feb. 2002)*

"The challenge to libraries regarding the Digital Divide is to justify the role of libraries in the information age. The challenge of the Digital Divide goes to the heart of the mission of libraries to provide equitable access to information for all -- regardless of the information format. The mission of libraries, as well as their associated services, programs, and technologies, is a key reason that libraries are indeed central to Digital Divide solutions and partnerships. Libraries, especially public, school and academic libraries, are the only institutions that are already structurally and programmatically prepared to fully address many of the Digital Divide issues." *(ALA, OITP Policy Brief)*

RHODE ISLAND AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

A report from the Taubman Center for Public Policy at Brown University (http://www.insidepolitics.org/policyreports/computers2000.html) stated that "Rhode Island Computer Ownership Doubled between 1994 and 2000, but Still Falls Behind New England and the Country".

- Researchers at Brown University studied patterns of computer and Internet usage by examining Census numbers for state, region, and nation. Among the conclusions: Rhode Island lags the region and country in computer usage, and there are wide variations in ownership by income, education, sex, age, and race.

- There are major gaps in computer ownership based on income, education, sex, age, and race. For example, whereas 90 percent of state residents earning $75,000 or more own computers, 12 percent of those making under $10,000 do. Eighty percent of college graduates own a computer, compared to 38 percent of high school graduates. Fifty-two percent of men own a computer while only 44 percent of women do.

- Forty-nine percent of whites have a computer, compared to 34 percent of African-Americans. There are big differences by age. Thirty-two percent of those aged 18 to 24 own a computer, compared to 63 percent of those 25 to 34, 68 percent of those 35 to 44, and 61 percent of those aged 45 to 54. Only 27 percent of individuals 55 or older own a computer.

- State residents are more likely to use the Internet at home than outside the home. Seventy-six percent indicated they used the Internet from a home computer while 21 percent said they used the Internet outside their home.

- When asked what their favorite uses of the Internet at home were, Rhode Islanders cited email (64 percent), followed by searching for information on government, business, health, or education (45 percent), checking for news, weather, or sports (34 percent), taking educational courses or conducting school research (32 percent), shopping or paying bills (27 percent), job-related tasks (22 percent), searching for jobs (10 percent), using it for games, entertainment, or fun (5 percent), and making phone calls (2 percent).

From *Education Week on the Web* – State Data Tables for Rhode Island (http://www.edweek.org/sreports/tc01/states/tc01state_data.cfm?slug=35ri_data.h20#access) the following tables show the differences between high-poverty/ high minority enrollment schools versus low-poverty/low minority-enrollment schools.

Percent of schools with Internet access (2000)	
Statewide	**91**
High-poverty schools	**67**
Low-poverty schools	**95**
High-minority-enrollment schools	**60**
Low-minority-enrollment schools	**93**

Percent of schools where the majority of teachers are "beginners" when it comes to using technology (2000)	
Statewide	**26**
High-poverty schools	**50**
Low-poverty schools	**24**
High-minority-enrollment schools	**50**
Low-minority-enrollment schools	**24**